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Recent Movement on Education and Training in Health Informatics

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At last, Issue 2 of Volume 20 is now officially published, ready to be read. This issue consists of ten unique contributions on a variety of healthcare informatics issues: One review article, six original research papers, two case reports, and one book review. In particular, the review article by Paton discusses Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) and its role in teaching health informatics through free online courses at a social networking site (SNS) for students and professionals around the world.

Health informatics has evolved over the past few decades, but international and more formal efforts in regards to education in this field have been established only recently by the International Medical Informatics Association (IMIA). Health informatics is a relatively new profession, especially compared to other healthcare professions, such as medicine and nursing. Health informatics professionals work in a number of roles that require a wide range of expertise in the field. Professionals in health informatics require knowledge and application skills in health, healthcare systems, information technology (IT), and management. In particular, IT is changing rapidly and is bringing in radical changes and opportunities to professions in health informatics.

In addition, considering the context of education and training, potential students for health informatics are professionals with some background in either health or IT. The education program needs to be designed for both professionals in a way that broadens their skills to meet the interdisciplinary knowledge requirements of health informatics while building the skills of their area of expertise. If students are health professionals, they may need courses to strengthen their IT skills, and if students are IT professionals, they may need courses that give them a better understanding of clinical settings and healthcare systems.

The domain of health informatics is usually interdisciplinary with a focus on the integration of areas, such as health, healthcare system, management, computing, and technology. Such wider expectations have difficult implications for the question of what needs to be taught to future health informatics professionals. In this context, it is good to hear that the IMIA Education Task Force has outlined the key competencies necessary for stand-alone health informatics courses at the undergraduate and post-graduate levels as well as embedded courses as a track to complement other aspects of healthcare training.

In terms of instructional methods and media, technology-aided instruction has been emerging, and ITs have been driving significant change throughout academia. As the rapid evolution of IT alters the constraints of space and time and reshapes the way students communicate, learn, and think, it is fundamentally changing the relationship between students and knowledge. Despite the fact that distance online learning in higher education is on the rise, online learning has been criticized by feelings of learner isolation and alienation, lack of participant interaction, and high dropout rates. However, along the rise of Web 2.0, SNSs have been viewed as tools that enable the use of participatory pedagogies able to address the problems of distance education.

SNSs have gained widespread interest for their potential to facilitate interaction, communication, learner participation, and collaboration and have recently been featured in

discussions on the use of technology to support and amplify educational endeavors. The Health Informatics Forum is one example of MOOCs through an SNS that aims to educate health informatics students and professionals. The content is delivered through narrated lectures with slides that can be viewed online with discussion threads that allow for class interactions. Students can maintain a professional profile, upload photos and files, write their own blog posts, and post discussion threads on the forum.

Education and training are important to everyone, but they are even more important in the healthcare industry, especially health informatics professionals. These fields re-quire knowledge and understanding of both health sciences and technology and are always evolving with new developments and discoveries. Therefore, it is essential for health informatics professionals to keep up with the latest changes. Advances in health informatics and educational technology have created a demand for online learning material in health informatics as well as a solution by providing such material. As the author emphasized, it is our hope as well that high quality health informatics education will be able to be delivered to a large global audience of future health informatics professionals without cost through the use of MOOC delivered on a social networking platform.